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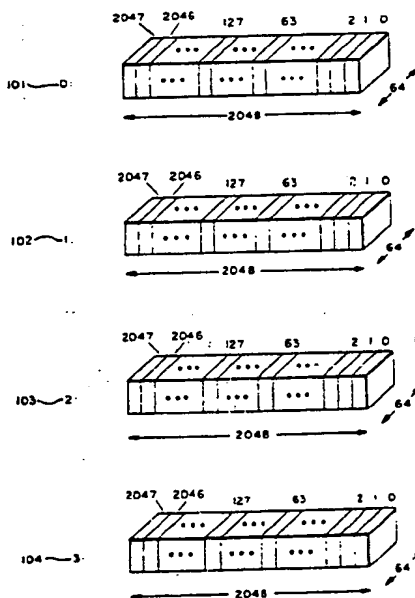G06F 12/06

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EP 0261751 A EP 0251559 A EP 0224691 A
EP 0165822 A EP 0024288 A

(58) Field of search
UK CL (Edition J) G4A AMB
INT CL⁴ G06F

(54) **Vector register file**

(57) A vector register file uses static random access memories organized in a plurality of banks to provide a logical multi-ported vector register file. Each of the four banks may be addressed independently during the same clock cycle. Further, the vector register file is divided into a plurality of context areas, each context area usable by a separate process. Use of a plurality of context areas avoids problems of swapping context data into and out of the vector register file. The method for addressing the vector register file allows for optional addressability to individual cells of the vector register file.
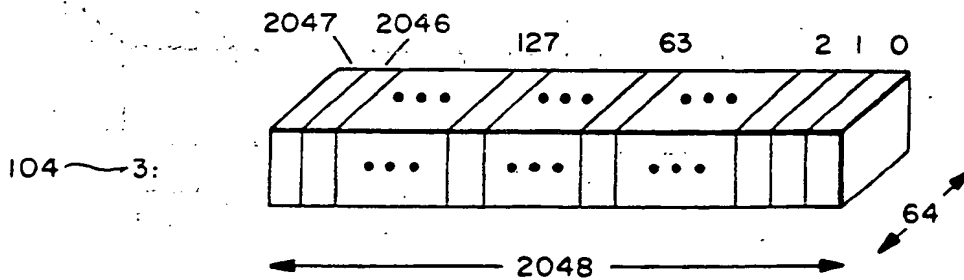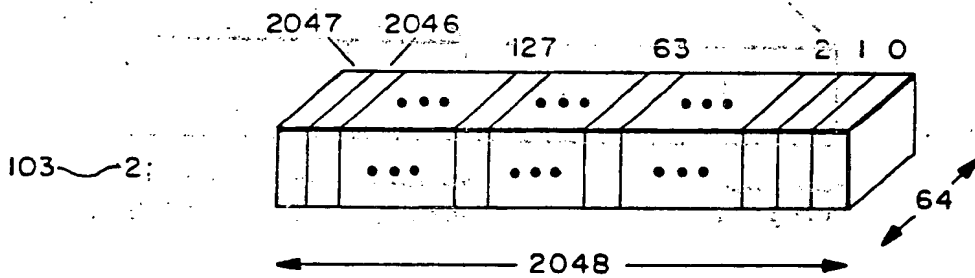
FIG_1

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At least one drawing originally filed was informal and the print reproduced here is taken from a later filed formal copy.

FIG_1

2216307

FIG_2

2216307

2216307

FIG_3

BANK

2047 1792 1791 1536 1535 1280 1279 1024 1023 768 767 512 511 256 255 0

301 ~ 0:

302 ~ 1:

303 ~ 2:

304 ~ 3:

CONTEXT 7 317
CONTEXT 6 316
CONTEXT 5 315
CONTEXT 4 314
CONTEXT 3 313
CONTEXT 2 312
CONTEXT 1 311
CONTEXT 0 310

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2216307

FIG_4

BANK

0:

1:

2:

3:

SBASE 410

128

UBASE 412

SLIMIT 411

PROCESS CONTEXT

2216307

FIG_5

BANK

0:

1:

2:

3:

SBASE
510

PREVIOUS
UBASE
520

CURRENT UBASE
521

SLIMIT
511

530

531

128

128

SHARED
VARIABLES
540

PREVIOUS SUBROUTINE
CONTEXT

CURRENT SUBROUTINE
CONTEXT

FIG 6

2216307

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600

Bit positions: 31 30 29 28 26 25 24 23 21 20 19 18 16 15 14 10 9 5 4 0

AC<1> VR_X<9..5> BANK<9..8> OFFSET<7..5>   601(a)

VR_Y<9..5> BANK<9..8> OFFSET<7..5>   602(a)

VR_Z<9..5> BANK<9..8> OFFSET<7..5>   603(a)

AC<0> VR_X<4..0> OFFSET<4..0>   601(b)

VR_Y<4..0> OFFSET<4..0>   602(b)

VR_Z<4..0> OFFSET<4..0>   603(b)

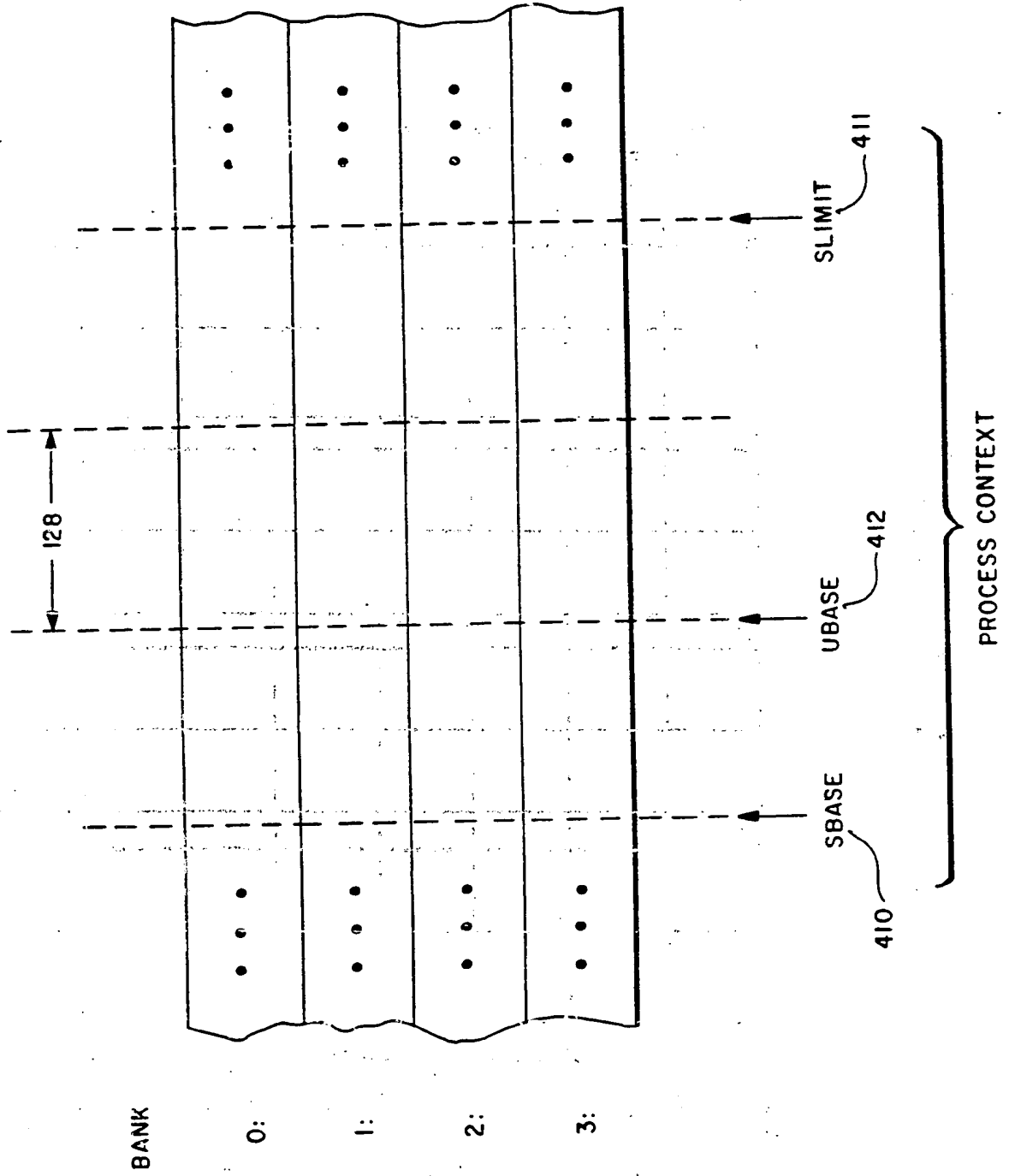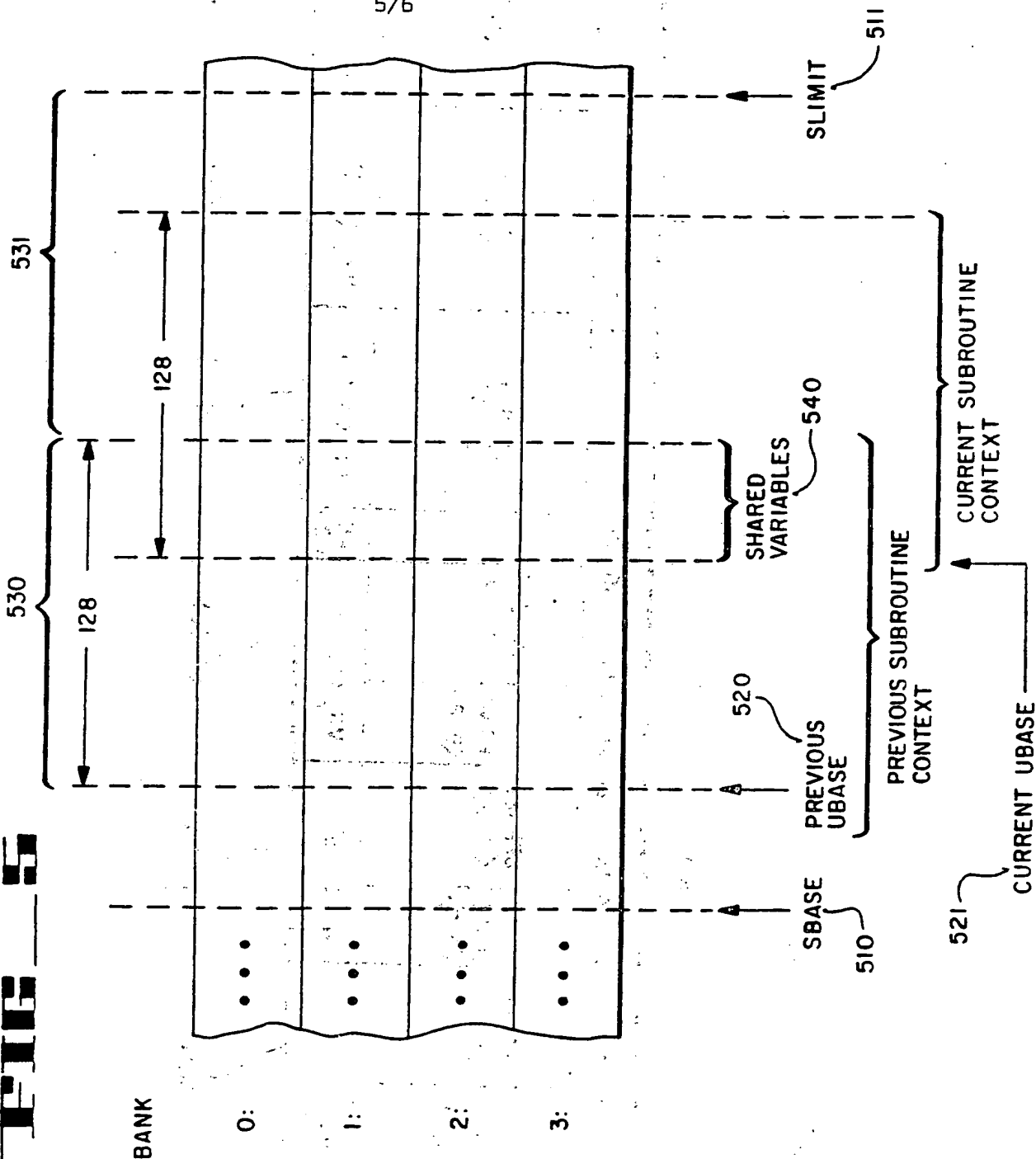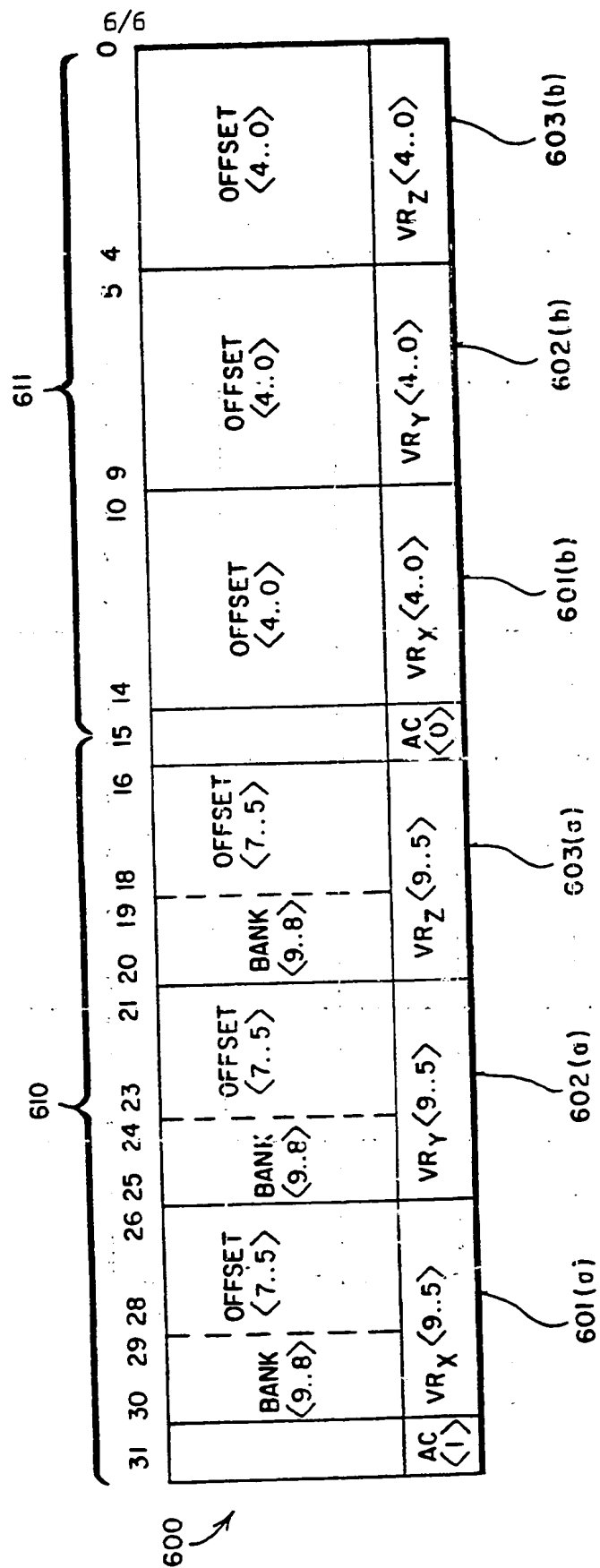610   611

VECTOR REGISTER FILE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1.   Field of the Invention.

The present invention relates to vector

register files for vector processing computer systems.

2.   Prior art.

In a vector processing computer system, a

vector register file is typically used for storing

vectors for computations. Operations in such a system

may then be carried out on a vector at a time. For

example, a operation such as ADD VREG1, VREG2, VREG3 in

a vector processing system may cause the first element

in vector register 1 to be added to the first element of

vector register 2 and the result to be stored in the

first element of vector register 3. The second element

of vector register 1 would, likewise, be added to the

second element of vector register 2 and the result would

be stored in the second element of vector register 3.

Each element of vector register 1 and vector register 2

is similarly processed and stored in the corresponding

element of vector register 3.

To increase processing speed in such computer

systems, multi-ported memories are commonly used to

construct the vector register files. Such multi-ported

memories offer the advantage of being able to read or

write to multiple memory locations during a single

memory cycle. However, such multi-ported memories

suffer from several drawbacks including typically being

more expensive to design, construct and purchase than

single-ported memories, being less readily available

than single-ported memories and typically being slower than single-ported memories.

Therefore, as one objective of the present invention, it is desired to design a vector register

5   file for a vector processing computer system which utilizes single-ported memory cells, while offering the speed advantages of multi-ported memories.

Known vector processing systems typically employ vector register files of a somewhat limited size. For

10 example, a typical CRAY computer system manufactured by Cray Research of Minneapolis, Minnesota may have 8 vector registers, each with a depth of 64 elements for a total of 512 elements. Other known systems typically employ between 2 and 4 times as much vector register

15 space. Normally, the increased vector register space is accomplished by increasing the depth (i.e. to a depth of 128 or 256) of each vector register. As a second objective of the present invention, it is desired to increase the available amount of vector registers space

20 and to provide increased flexibility in the utilization and management of that space.

A third objective of the present invention is to provide programming flexibility allowing for execution of instructions which operate on vector, and

25 computations which require access to a vector at an arbitrary point. Examples of such computations arise in recurrence and/or cumulation calculations.

A vector register file and methods for managing
access to the vector register file is described. The
present invention discloses use of static random access
memories (SRAMs) organized in a plurality of banks and
operating at least two times the system clock speed to
simulate multi-ported memories. Through use of SRAMs to
build a vector register file a number of inventive
features are achieved.

Use of SRAMs allows a computer system to be
configured with a relatively large amount of vector
register file space. This space may be divided into a
plurality of context areas, each context area for
supporting a separate process. The use of such context
areas avoids the need to swap the context information in
a vector register file to disk when switching between
processes. The present invention discloses use of a
system base register, a user base register and a system
limit register to support the use of a plurality of
context areas.

The present invention further discloses an
addressing scheme for addressing the context areas which
allows for optional addressability to individual
elements or cells in a vector.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a block diagram illustrating banks of memories as may be utilized by the present invention.

5

Figure 2 is a block diagram illustrating a method of dividing the banks of memories into a plurality of vector registers as taught by the present invention.

10 Figure 3 is a block diagram illustrating a method of dividing the banks of memories into a plurality of context areas as taught by the present invention.

Figure 4 is a block diagram illustrating the use of
15 system base, user base and system limit registers taught by the present invention.

Figure 5 is a block diagram illustrating the use of system base, user base and system limit registers and
20 the use of shared variables between subroutines taught by the present invention.

Figure 6 is a block diagram illustrating an operand descripter as may be utilized by the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PRESENT INVENTION

A vector register file is described. In the
following description, numerous specific details are set

5   forth such as specific number of bits, specific
dimensions, etc., in order to provide a thorough
understanding of the present invention. It will be
obvious, however, to one of ordinary skill in the art
that the present invention may be practiced without

10   these specific details. In other instances, well-known
circuits, structures and techniques have not been shown
in detail in order to avoid unnecessarily obscuring the
present invention.

15
VECTOR REGISTER FILE

The present invention discloses arranging a vector
register file in a vector processing computer system as
a plurality of banks of random-access memories (RAMs).

20   For the purposes used herein, the term "bank" shall
refer to an independently cycleable collection of
memories. That is, each of the plurality of banks may
be independently addressed during the same clock cycle.

The preferred embodiment of the present invention

25   will be described in more detail with reference to
Figure 1. The preferred embodiment utilizes four banks
of memories, 101, 102, 103 and 104, for its vector
register file. Each bank, 101, 102, 103 and 104
comprises eight 2,048 x 8 static random-access memories

30   (SRAMs) arranged such that a bank may be comprised of
2,048 64-bit elements.

The present invention achieves a logical equivalent
of an 8-ported memory through the combination of two
techniques. First, arranging the memories in 4 banks,
or collections of independently cycleable memories

5 achieves the equivalent of a 4-ported memory (e.g. a
write may be done to banks Ø and 1 in the same clock
cycle as a read from banks 2 and 3). Second, the
present invention utilizes SRAMs having access times at
least twice as fast as the system clock speed,

10 effectively allowing two accesses to each bank during a
given system clock cycle. In the preferred embodiment,
the system clock runs at a 120 nanoseconds (ns),
requiring use of SRAMs with an access time of at most 60
ns. It is preferred to utilize SRAMs with an access

15 time of 35 ns or faster. Therefore, each of the four
banks may be accessed two times during any given clock
cycle, yielding a logical 8-ported memory.

It will be obvious to one of ordinary skill that
these methods may be utilized either individually or in

20 combination to achieve the objective of multi-ported
memory. It will be further obvious that a different
number of banks, different size memories or different
speed memories achieving more than 2 accesses per system
clock may be utilized without departure from the spirit

25 and scope of the present invention.

Among the advantages offered by the present
inventions use of vector register file comprised of
SRAMs is the relative-low cost of SRAMs, availability of
SRAMs from multiple vendors and the relative speed

30 available from current SRAM technology. These

advantages and other factors allow use of a vector register file of a greater size than utilized in known vector processing systems.

The present invention discloses several inventive

5 techniques and features for management and use of the vector register file.

As one feature of the present invention, each of the plurality of banks may be divided into a plurality of vector registers. For example, referring to Figure

10 2, each of the banks 201, 202, 203 and 204 may be divided into a plurality of vector registers such as vector registers 210, 211, 212 and 213. In the particular example in Figure 2, each 2,048-element bank is divided into 64 32-element vector registers.

15 In fact, the banks, 301, 302, 303 and 304 may be divided into any number n, of vector registers, up to a maximum of p, where a p is the number of elements in a bank. Each vector register has p/n elements. The particular values for p and n may be chosen by

20 convention depending on the advantage and disadvantage tradeoffs of having a large number of vector registers versus having vector registers with a large number elements (i.e. depth) in a particular case. The particular convention may be enforced by either hardware

25 apparatus or software methods.

Utilizing the present invention, a vector register may begin at any element in a bank. The particular method of addressing elements will be described in more detail with reference to Figure 6.

In the preferred embodiment, a particular vector register may be referred to utilizing a bank number and an offset. For example VR0(0) may refer to the first vector register in banks 0, VR0(32) may refer to the

5   second vector register in bank 0 where the vector registers are 32-elements long, VR0(64) may refer to the third vector register in bank 0, etc.

As one alternative, vector registers may be referred to utilizing a bank number and a vector number.

10 For example, VR0,0 may refer to a vector register in bank 0, number 0. The system may then be responsible for translating the vector number (i.e. 0) to an offset. VR0,1 may refer to the second vector register in bank 0. Again, the system may be responsible for translating the

15 vector number (i.e. 1) to an offset. For example, if each vector register is to be 32-elements wide, the system would translate vector number 1 to offset 32.

As a third alternative, vector registers may be referred to with a vector register number only. The

20 system may then be responsible for translating the vector number to a bank and offset. For example, VR0 may be translated to bank 0, offset 0, VR1 may be translated to bank 1, offset 0, VR2 may be translated to bank 2, offset 0, VR3 may be translated to bank 3,

25 offset 0, VR4 may be translated to bank 0, offset 32, etc.

Each of these alternatives may offer tradeoffs in portability of program code versus speed of translated the vector numbers.

30

VECTOR REGISTER CONTEXT AREAS

In the present invention, as previously discussed, a comparatively large amount of vector register space is available. It is generally not necessary to have

5 available to any single process the entire amount of vector register space. Therefore, as another inventive aspect of the present invention, vector register space may be divided into a plurality of process context areas. The system may then support a plurality of

10 processes without the requirement of swapping a process' context data from the vector register file to another storage medium, such as a disk, when switching between processes.

Referring to Figure 3, in one embodiment, the

15 2,048-element banks 301, 302, 303 and 304 are divided into eight context areas 310-317 of length 256 elements in each bank.

Referring to Figure 4, when running a process, the system maintains a base register, SBASE 410. SBASE 410

20 contains the offset of the current context area from the beginning of the bank (i.e. from element 0). For example, if the current context is context area 312 of Figure 3, SBASE 410 contains the value 512. Utilizing SBASE 410, the system may switch between the current

25 process and a process with context data in a different context area by changing the value of SBASE 410. When running a process, the value of SBASE 410 is added to the offset value of any reference to vector memory.

The SBASE register is further utilized to insure

30 user processes do not reference offsets below the

assigned context area. Further, use of the SBASE
register allows a process to be written independent of
the particular context area it is assigned to. A
process may be written to run as if it would always
5   execute in the first context 310.

It will be obvious to one of ordinary skill that
the vector register file may be divided into any number
of context areas n between 1 and p, where p is the
number of elements in a bank. The number of elements
10   per context area is equal to p/n. The particular number
n may be determined by a number of factors. It will be
further obvious that it is possible to vary the size of
the context areas, such that they are not of equal size,
allowing use of a smaller context area for a relatively
15   small process and a larger context area for a relatively
large process.

The present invention further utilizes a second
register, SLIMIT 411, to indicate the last referenceable
element of the current context area. SLIMIT 411 is used
20   to insure a process does not attempt to reference an
element at an offset greater than an offset in its
context area. Any reference to an element in the vector
register file is compared against SLIMIT 411. If the
reference is for an element with an offset greater than
25   SLIMIT 411, it is inhibited and an error condition is
indicated.

The present invention further utilizes a third
register, UBASE 412, which allows a particular process
to further divide its own context space. Typically, the
30   operating system may be responsible for manipulating the

SBASE and SLIMIT registers. A user process may
manipulate the UBASE register. For example, a process
may have context data for individual subroutines located
at fixed offsets from a given value for UBASE 412. The

5   user sets UBASE 412 when executing the subroutine to the
given value for UBASE 412. The subroutine then may
reference elements in the vector register file by
supplying the offset value from UBASE 412. The system
computes the actual offset within the vector register

10 file by computing (SBASE 410) + (UBASE 412) + (the given
offset).

Referring to Figure 5, a method for sharing context
data and subroutines is disclosed. A process may locate
its context data anywhere within the limits of SBASE 510

15 and SLIMIT 511. The process may initially set its UBASE
register to point 520 to reference area 530 when running
a first subroutine. The process may change the UBASE
register to point 521 to reference area 531. Area 540
contains shared variables or other shared context

20 information which may be referenced by either
subroutine.

A second use of the UBASE register is to allow
addressing of the full system base area (area bounded by
SBASE and SLIMIT) using a limited length address field.

25 For example, assume the system base area is 512 elements
long and an eight bit address is to be used for
addressing within this area. To address elements with
relative offsets from SBASE of 0 to 255, UBASE is set to
0. To address elements with relative offsets from SBASE

of 256 to 511, UBASE is set to 256 and elements are
addressed as (0 to 255) + UBASE (i.e. 256 to 511).

Referring now to Figure 6, an operand descriptor
600 for instructions of the preferred embodiment is

5   described. Instructions in the preferred embodiment may
comprise three operands; vector register x (VR$_x$), 601(a)
and 601(b), vector register y (VR$_y$), 602(a) and 602(b),
and vector register z (VR$_z$), 603(a) and 603(b).

A vector register may be addressed by supplying a

10   bank number in bits 9 and 8 of the vector register
operand and an offset value in bits 7-0.

In the preferred embodiment, bits 9 through 5 of
each vector register operand are placed in the high
order half of the word 610. Utilizing bits 9 through 5

15   of the address, any of four banks of the preferred
embodiment may be addressed with bits 9 and 8, and
offsets within the banks may be addressed in multiples
of 32. For example, a value of 00001$_2$ in bits 9 through
5 of a vector register operand would reference bank 0,

20   offset 32. A value of 11010$_2$ would reference bank 3,
offset 64. As discussed previously, the values of SBASE
and UBASE are added to the offsets.

The splitting of the vector register address allows
a 16-bit constant, instead of a 32-bit constant, to

25   reference a vector register. It will be obvious to one
of ordinary skill that the particular address bit
organization may be modified without departure from the
scope and spirit of the present invention.

In the preferred embodiment, an immediate constant

30   of 16 bits or less may be stored as part of an

instruction.   Therefore, by utilizing only the high-

order half of a word to store operand information, the

present invention is able to store the operand

information in the instruction. This method saves

5   processing time due to not having to retrieve the

operand information separate from the instruction.

If it is desired to address a cell of a vector

register directly or utilize a vector register for

storing scalar variables, the lower half of the operand

10   word 611 provides the remainder of the offset address

information in bits 4 through 0 of the offset. It is

also required to utilize bits 4 through 0 of the offset

in order to allow for overlapping data for subroutines

as described previously in connection with Figure 5.

15   Cell-level addressability allows for convolution

and recurrence calculation to be performed. For

example, utilizing the cell-level addressability

feature, a convolution calculation such as:

20   DO I = 1, 32

Y(I) = W(1) * X[I+1]

+ W(2) * X[I+2]

+ W(3) * X[I+3]

END

25

may be calculated. Further, the preferred embodiment of

the present invention executes all operations, including

operations on individual elements of a vector, in an

order consistent with sequential execution. This, in

30   combination, with cell-level addressability allows

recurrences, such as a Fibonacci sequence, to be
calculated directly.

Thus, a vector register file and method for

5   managing access to the vector register file is
described.

CLAIMS

1.   A vector register file for a vector processing computer system, comprising;

a first bank of memory circuits;

a second bank of memory circuits, said second bank of memory circuits cycleable independent from said first bank.

2.   A vector register file, as recited by Claim 1, wherein said first bank of memory circuits is comprised of static random access memories.

3.   A vector register file, as recited by Claim 1, wherein said first bank of memory circuits is comprised of eight 2,048 by 8 static random access memories.

4.   A vector register file, as recited by Claim 1, further comprising:

a third bank of memories, said third bank of memories cycleable independent from said first bank of memories and said second bank of memories;

a fourth bank of memory circuits, said fourth bank of memory circuits cycleable independent from said first bank of memory circuits, said second bank of memory circuits, and said third bank of memory circuits.

5.   A vector register file, as recited by Claim 1, wherein each of said memory circuits is accessible at 2 times the system clock cycle time.

6.   A vector register file, as recited by Claim 5, wherein said system clock cycle time is approximately 120 ns and said memory circuits may be accessed at most approximately 60 ns.

7.   A vector register file, as recited by Claim 5, wherein said system clock cycle time is approximately 120 ns and said memory circuits may be accessed at least approximately 35 ns.

8.   A vector processing computer system having a vector register file, comprising:
        a system clock having a cycle time of n;
        a plurality of memory circuits, said memory circuits having an access time of at least approximately n/p, where p is at least 2.

9.   The vector processing computer system, as recited by Claim 8, wherein n is approximately 120 ns and p is at most approximately 50 ns.

10.   A vector processing computer system, comprising:
        a vector register file;
        a system base register for storing a system base value, said system base value being added to an offset value for addressing said vector register file.

11. A vector processing computer system, as recited by Claim 10, further comprising a limit register for storing a limit value, said limit value being compared with the sum of said system base value and said offset, if said sum is greater than said limit, an error condition being indicated.

12. A vector processing computer system, as recited by Claim 10, further comprising a user base register for storing a user base value, said user base value being added to said offset value and said system base value when addressing said vector register file.

13. A vector processing computer system, as recited by Claim 10, wherein said system base value is changed when said vector processing computer system changes active processes.

14. In a vector processing computer system having a vector register file and a system base register, said system base register for storing a system base value, a method for addressing vector register file comprising the steps of:

(a) adding an offset value to said system base value giving a sum;

(b) addressing said vector register file at said sum; and

(c) said vector processing computer system changing its active process;

(d)   changing the value of said system base
register in response to said changing of processes.

15.   The vector processing computer system, as
recited by Claim 14, further comprising a user base
register for storing a user base value said method
further comprising the step of adding said user base
value to said sum prior to addressing said vector
register file.

16.   The vector processing computer system, as
recited by Claim 14, further comprising a limit register
for storing a limit value, said method further
comprising the step of comparing said sum with said
limit value and generating an error condition if said
sum is greater than said limit value prior to addressing
said vector register file.

17.   The vector processing computer system, as
recited by Claim 16, further comprising the step of
changing said limit value in response to said changing
of processes.

18.   In a vector processing computer system having
a vector register file, said vector register file
comprising addressable elements, a method of dividing
said vector register file into a plurality of vector
registers comprising the steps of:
(a)   determining a value n, said value n indicating
a desired number of vector registers;

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(b)   logically dividing said vector register file into said plurality of vector registers, each of said vector registers having a depth of p/n elements.

19.   The vector processing computer system of Claim 18, wherein p is 2048.

20.   In a vector processing computer system having a vector register file, said vector processing computer system having instructions requiring a plurality of operands, said operands comprising addresses within said vector register file, a method of storing said operands, comprising:

storing a first plurality of bits of said address for each of said operands in a first half of a word;

storing a second plurality of bits of said address of each of said operands in a second half of said word.

21.   The vector processing computer system, as recited by Claim 20, wherein said first plurality of bits comprises bits 9 through 5 of said address of each of said operands.

22.   The vector processing computer system, as recited by Claim 21, wherein said second plurality of bits comprises bits 4 through 0 of said address of each of said operands.

23.   A vector register file for a vector processing computer system substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

Amendments to the claims
have been filed as follows

1.   A vector register file for a vector
processing computer system, comprising:
        a first bank of memory circuits for storing
a first plurality of vectors;
        a second bank of memory circuits for
storing a second plurality of vectors, said second
bank of memory circuits cycleable independent from
said first bank.

2.   A vector register file, as recited by Claim
1, wherein said first bank of memory circuits is
comprised of static random access memories.

3.   A vector register file, as recited by Claim
1, wherein said first bank of memory circuits is
comprised of eight 2,048 by 8 static random access
memories.

4.   A vector register file, as recited by Claim
1, further comprising:
        a third bank of memories, said third bank
of memories cycleable independent from said first
bank of memories and said second bank of memories;
        a fourth bank of memory circuits, said
fourth bank of memory circuits cycleable independent
from said first bank of memory circuits, said second
bank of memory circuits, and said third bank of
memory circuits.

5.   A vector register file, as recited by Claim
1, wherein each of said memory circuits is accessible
at 2 times the system clock cycle time.

6.   A vector register file, as recited by Claim 5,
wherein said system clock cycle time is approximately
120 ns and said memory circuits may be accessed at most
approximately 60 ns.

7.   A vector register file, as recited by Claim 5,
wherein said system clock cycle time is approximately
120 ns and said memory circuits may be accessed at least
approximately 35 ns.

8.   A vector processing computer system having a
vector register file, comprising:

a system clock having a cycle time of n;

a plurality of memory circuits, said memory
circuits having an access time of at least approximately
n/p, where p is at least 2.

9.   The vector processing computer system, as
recited by Claim 8, wherein n is approximately 120 ns
and p is at most approximately 60 ns.

10.   A vector processing computer system,
comprising:

a vector register file;

a system base register for storing a system base
value, said system base value being added to an offset
value for addressing said vector register file.

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11.   A vector processing computer system, as recited by Claim 10, further comprising a limit register for storing a limit value, said limit value being compared with the sum of said system base value and said offset, if said sum is greater than said limit, an error condition being indicated.

12.   A vector processing computer system, as recited by Claim 10, further comprising a user base register for storing a user base value, said user base value being added to said offset value and said system base value when addressing said vector register file.

13.   A vector processing computer system, as recited by Claim 10, wherein said system base value is changed when said vector processing computer system changes active processes.

14.   In a vector processing computer system having a vector register file and a system base register, said system base register for storing a system base value, a method for addressing vector register file comprising the steps of:

(a)   adding an offset value to said system base value giving a sum;

(b)   addressing said vector register file at said sum; and

(c)   said vector processing computer system changing its active process;

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(d) changing the value of said system base register in response to said changing of processes.

15. The vector processing computer system, as recited by Claim 14, further comprising a user base register for storing a user base value said method further comprising the step of adding said user base value to said sum prior to addressing said vector register file.

16. The vector processing computer system, as recited by Claim 14, further comprising a limit register for storing a limit value, said method further comprising the step of comparing said sum with said limit value and generating an error condition if said sum is greater than said limit value prior to addressing said vector register file.

17. The vector processing computer system, as recited by Claim 16, further comprising the step of changing said limit value in response to said changing of processes.

18. In a vector processing computer system having a vector register file, said vector register file comprising addressable elements, a method of dividing said vector register file into a plurality of vector registers comprising the steps of:

(a) determining a value n, said value n indicating a desired number of vector registers;

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(b)   logically dividing said vector register file
into said plurality of vector registers, each of said
vector registers having a depth of p/n elements.

19.   The vector processing computer system of Claim
18, wherein p is 2048.

20.   In a vector processing computer system having
a vector register file, said vector processing computer
system having instructions requiring a plurality of
operands, said operands comprising addresses within said
vector register file, a method of storing said operands,
comprising:
   storing a first plurality of bits of said address
for each of said operands in a first half of a word;
   storing a second plurality of bits of said address
of each of said operands in a second half of said word.

21.   The vector processing computer system, as
recited by Claim 20, wherein said first plurality of
bits comprises bits 9 through 5 of said address of each
of said operands.

22.   The vector processing computer system, as
recited by Claim 21, wherein said second plurality of
bits comprises bits 4 through 0 of said address of each
of said operands.

23.   A vector register file for a vector processing
computer system substantially as hereinbefore described
with reference to the accompanying drawings.